India-China Rapprochement: Implications for U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy

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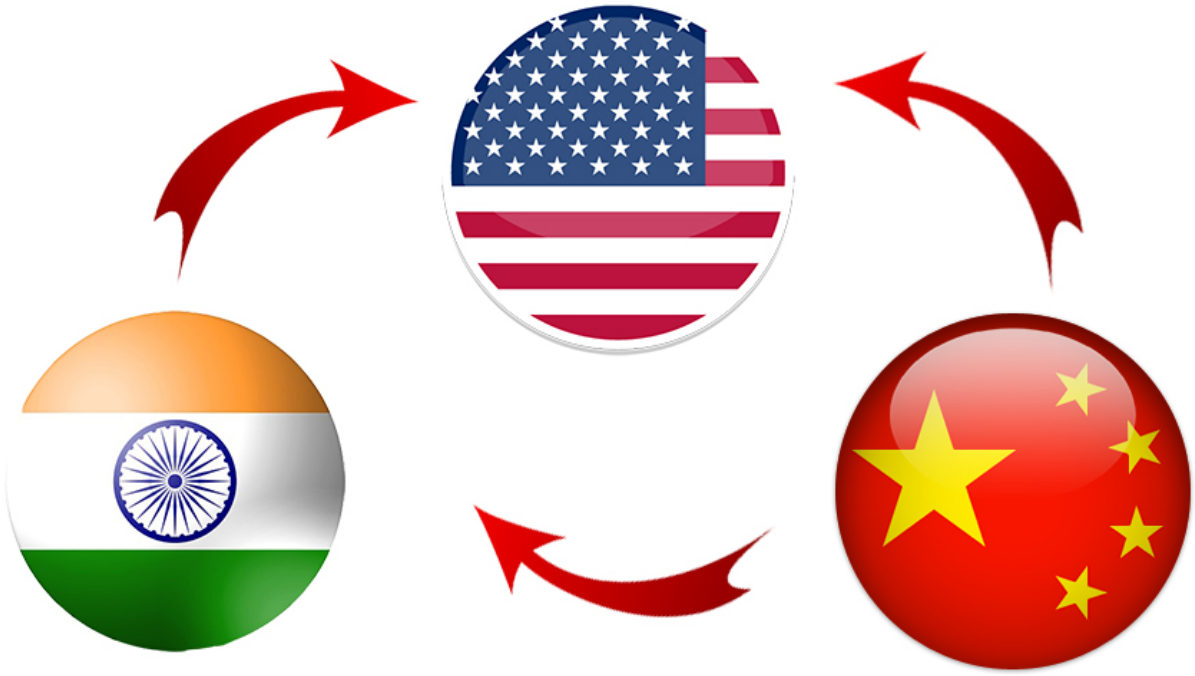

Muhammad Salman

U.S. strategic focus on the Indo-Pacific region has undergone a significant transformation in recent geopolitical trends. India's and China's recent diplomatic moves have led to significant changes within the geopolitical landscape.

The BRICS 2024 conference witnessed a symbolic encounter when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping posed for a handshake photo. This minor action attracted global attention and sparked discussions about a possible major shift in India's strategy, potentially impacting the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Initiative.

> ***India's diplomatic engagement with China prompts U.S. to reassess its Indo-Pacific strategy.***

The handshake between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi has raised concerns among U.S. geopolitical analysts, prompting a reassessment of India's part in the Indo-Pacific. Some suggest that this gesture shows India adjusting its foreign policy, perhaps even stepping back from strong engagement with the United States, especially in opposition to China's expansion of regional power. That change might lower India's

participation in major agreements, including the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), a strategic partnership of the U.S., India, Japan, and Australia previously considered crucial for containing China.

Emerging debates and news also point to India maybe no longer being part of Japan-led Asian NATO's top priority. These changes are in line with growing worries inside U.S. concerns about the effectiveness of its strategy in the Indo-Pacific, especially in light of India's apparent pivot towards China. From China's view, several factors, especially economic and geopolitical ones, are driving India's diplomatic change.

Chinese state-controlled media, the Global Times, observed that growing trade tensions have eroded India's confidence in the United States. Economic relations between India and the United States were under pressure from tariffs on Indian exports, especially under the Trump presidency and U.S. trade policies.

Furthermore, especially with the "Make in India" program, India has yet to experience the level of foreign investment it had hoped from the United States. India has reevaluated its goals and seems to be turning to China to stabilize along its boundaries as these standards go unmet. This change is a practical reaction to the fiscal uncertainties caused by trade tensions and American expectations not being met.

The United States faces great obstacles in its Indo-Pacific strategy due to India's move towards China. Originally, the U.S., especially via the Quad, had counted on India as a major ally in reacting to China's increasing influence. India's changing ties with China, though, point to a possible doubt in its support of the Indo-Pacific framework led by the United States.

> ***The Modi-Xi handshake at the BRICS 2024 conference has sparked discussions about a potential shift in India's foreign policy.***

The United States would become less involved in the Indo-Pacific were India to do so and could experience more complicated geopolitics. India's decreased involvement in many security agreements might damage the Quad and obstruct the more general idea of an "Asia NATO," which was first conceived as a front united against China's aggressiveness.

From a strategic pragmatic perspective, Chinese experts consider India's most recent diplomatic actions. They contend that India's turn toward China demonstrates difficulties in completely disconnecting from China while also supporting programs led by the United States. Although India's "Make in India" campaign has not drawn the hoped-for U.S. level of attention, it is still running investment and provoking India to reset its goals. In this situation, China, especially after some difficult border talks, offers itself as a more stable and predictable partner for India.

Chinese geopolitical analysts also mention worries over American uncertainty and reference current internal difficulties and changing policies. These elements, along with U.S. changes in uncertainty around it, including in terms of stability and long-term predictability, trade ties have made China an increasingly attractive option for India.

> ***India's pivot towards China may impact its involvement in U.S.-led initiatives like the Quad.***

Although India's choice to interact with China more might be viewed as practical, along with that, it might also carry some risks. As India's pivot towards China and disengagement from the U.S. and its regional allies, China, then, could become more aggressive in territorial disputes such as in Arunachal Pradesh as at that time India (U.S. disengagement) will be quite alone against China. Furthermore, if China achieves its goals about Taiwan, India could have more security issues along its frontiers.

The author is a research intern at the Islamabad Policy Research Institute, focusing on Asian geopolitics, China's rise, and U.S. policy in the region.